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ABSTRACT

Equality of educational opportunity implies giving each child an opportunity for unlimited success in the educational system. Equal educational opportunity requires a particularized educational response to the characteristics of the individual. An educational finance plan that provides equality of educational opportunity should take into account the factors of district wealth, local tax effort, pupil need, cost differentials, and municipal overburden. The most common method of equalizing the wealth and effort factors is through the commitment of state funds for equalization purposes; the ideal school finance plan guarantees identical yields for identical effort. A school finance plan must also incorporate a "pupil need" criterion. The concept of equal educational expenditures for all children is further invalidated by differences in school costs in different localities. Therefore, a state equalization formula must include some form of cost-of-living index. In addition, an allowance for municipal overburden must be made in the distribution of school funds; such adjustments can be made by use of a weighted formula that relates average total taxes for the state to total taxes in a school district. (Author/JG)

FUNDING EDUCATION FOR MINORITY GROUPS

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The last two decades in American education have been characterized by the ever-present issue of equality of educational opportunity. Brown v Board of Education marked the beginning of this era through its attack upon pupil assignment practices. Studies conducted subsequent to Brown indicate that this litigation and its progeny were massive failures in terms of altering the relative poor school performance of minority group children indicating that regardless of the merits of desegregation in itself, it cannot remedy other problems characteristic of the education of minority children.

Brown v Board of Education has already produced another progeny which appears more promising for the academic performance of minority children. Though most of the following cases originated as desegregation cases, a strong thrust was made into the desegregation of instructional programs. U.S. v Texas, Keyes v Denver, Lau v Nichols, Portales v Serna and Aspira v Board of Education are typical cases in which the courts have intervened in behalf of minority students with resulting court orders which are aimed at altering instructional programs to meet the unique needs or characteristics of minority students. In each of these court cases, the school system was mandated to change its instructional program offerings to make it compatible with the characteristics of a minority group.

Similar efforts to change the plight of instructional offerings to minority children were made through legislation. The Elementary and Secondary Education Act, Emergency School Assistance Act, the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and Equality of Educational Opportunity Act of 1974 all address the concept of modified instructional programs for atypical school populations.

Any changes brought about either through litigation or legislation have a strong or direct bearing upon the concept of school finance. So much so that it is possible that in the last decade, American education will be characterized by changing financial practices which will produce equality of educational opportunity.

Definition of Equality of Educational Opportunity

Equality of educational opportunity implies giving to each child an opportunity for unlimited success in the educational system. Each child must have the opportunity to develop to his maximum self-realization.

Equality of educational opportunity does NOT imply that all children have the same potential. It does not imply that all children receive an identical education, that all children will progress at the same rate, nor that all children will achieve at the same level.

The same variety of characteristics which makes all children different demands a variety of instructional programs compatible with these characteristics.

If education is to be equally accessible to all children, then education must include a variety of activities in keeping with differences in age, grade level, socioeconomic backgrounds, physical and intellectual differences, educational handicaps, and unique characteristics of language, culture, ethnicity and race.

Equal educational opportunity requires a particularized educational response to the characteristics of the individual. The objective is not to handicap children who display traits commonly found conducive to school success, but rather to neutralize handicaps in our educational systems which have been found detrimental to the success of children.

In order for equality of educational opportunity to exist in school instructional programs, it is necessary that schools have the necessary resources for the development and implementation of adequate programs.

An ideal state system of school finance assures that all school systems have equal access to the wealth necessary for acquiring and offering an adequate school program to all children, regardless of individual characteristics. Failure to do so means the continued squandering of our most precious local, state and national resource -- our children.

As a result of Rodriguez, a variety of organizations and state agencies have devoted considerable attention to the development of alternative systems of school finance.

Misinterpretation of the "equal access to wealth" principle of Rodriguez has often led to the erroneous assumption that equality of educational opportunity implies equal expenditure for all children. Early state responses invariably incorporated a "one child, one dollar" principle for the distribution of funds.

Basic Concepts of School Finance and Equality of Educational Opportunity

The "one child, one dollar" principle tends to create inequalities almost as severe as the ones attacked by Rodriguez. A plan for the financing of the public schools which provide equality of educational opportunity to all children of the state should take the following five factors into consideration: wealth, effort, pupil need, cost differentials and municipal overburden.

Wealth

A state plan which delegates to the local school district responsibility and authority for the collection of taxes to provide local funds for the support of the school program must take into consideration the varying wealth characteristics of the school districts.

Varying amounts of taxable wealth among the school districts will produce substantial differences in tax yield. The differences are so large that if no equalization program is provided in a state like Texas utilizing identical tax rates, one school district will receive 163 times more revenue than another. Obviously, a system of school finance which provides unlimited and unequalized taxing authority to the local school district has a built-in denial of equality of educational opportunity.

Effort

One of the strongest criticisms against a full state support system of public school finance is that such a system would mean the elimination of the local effort factor. Traditionally, local communities have been given the option of self-determination on the amount of effort they wish to exercise in support of the schools. Therefore, tax rates, assessment percentages and market value determinations are very much the prerogative of the local school district with very little constraints other than broad maximum tax rates imposed by the state. Thus, in an ideal state plan for the financing of the public schools, a community or school district may determine the amount of effort which it wishes to make in support of the schools.

The effort factor must be coupled with the wealth factor in order to provide equality of educational opportunity. Specifically, the wealth and effort factors should include an equalization system to compensate for the differences in taxable wealth among districts.

The most common method of building equalization into the wealth and effort factors is through the commitment of state funds for equalization purposes. Thus, the ideal state plan for public school finance guarantees through state funding identical yields for identical effort.

For example, supposing that school districts A, B and C had identical assessment and tax rates, due to the differences in the amount of taxable property in the three districts, District A raised $500 per pupil through a $1 per $100 valuation tax rate; District B produced $400 per pupil with an identical tax rate; and District C raised $300 per pupil. The state would provide no fund assistance to District A; $100 per pupil to District B; and $200 per pupil to District C. The resulting equalized yield would be as follows:

District	Tax Rate	Per Pupil Taxable Property	Tax Yield	State Equalization	Available Per Pupil
A	$1.00	$50,000	$500	-0-	$500
B	1.00	40,000	400	100	500
C	1.00	30,000	300	200	500

Pupil Need

A state system for the distribution of school funds which purports to provide equality of educational opportunity cannot achieve this end unless the formula for distribution also incorporates a "need" criterion.

The same degree of educational opportunity implies differing types of educational programs for different children. Age; grade level; socioeconomic background; and equipment needed to support the program will likewise vary. A blind child needs different types of textbooks and instructional media due to the unique handicap which he has. Emotionally disturbed children cannot be housed, let alone taught, in groups of thirty.

Similarly, different amounts of funds are required for the support of an educational program for different children. Age; grade level; socioeconomic background; physical, intellectual and educational handicaps; language; and cultural characteristics all require unique instructional programs which in turn require different levels of economic support.

In 1971, the National Educational Finance Project (NEFP) developed a system of program cost differentials which give a weighted formula based on a basic unit of 1.00 for a typical student and multiples of 1.00 per special categories.

The following table taken from the NEFP report, "Alternative Programs for Financing Education," gives the weights determined for various categories.

Aggregate Measure of
Program Cost Differentials
1968-69

Program (1)	Average Per Pupil Cost Differential (4)
Early Childhood and Elementary Education	
1. Parent Education Program	1.40
2. Nursery School 3- & 4-year-olds	1.40
3. Kindergarten	1.30
I. Subtotal	
4. Extended Day-Care Program	1.30
5. Special Education: Severely Handicapped Mentally & Physically (Grades: 6 and below)	2.55
6. Detention Schools: Severely Maladjusted Socially & Emotionally (Grades: 6 and below)	2.55
7. Compensatory Programs: Remedian for emotional educational difficulties (Grades: 6 and below)	1.68
8. Basic Education (Grades: 1-6)	1.00
II. Subtotal	
Secondary Education	
9. Special Education: Severely Handicapped Mentally & Physically (Grades: 7-12)	2.03
10. Detention Schools: Severely Maladjusted Socially & Emotionally (Grades: 7-12)	2.66
11. Compensatory Programs: Remediation for emotional difficulties (Grades: 7-12)	1.83
12. Vocational Education (Grades: 7-12)	1.52
13. Basic Education (Grades: 7-12)	1.28

Cost Differentials

The concept of "one child, one dollar," or equal expenditures for the education of all children is further invalidated by differences in the quantity and quality of education that a tax dollar may purchase in different localities. Intrastate differences in cost are further accentuated in the larger states, such as Texas, California and New York, which just on geographic factors alone, find varying purchase values for the school tax dollar.

In general, large metropolitan areas exhibit a significantly higher cost of living than the rural areas. Regardless of the cause of this phenomenon, it does exist, so the expenditure of equal amounts for education in different parts of the state results in the unequal acquisition of educational goods and services. The unequal utilization of educational resources (goods and services) then produce an inequality of educational opportunity.

Therefore, a state equalization formula must include some form of a cost of living index for the distribution of the tax dollar.

A recent publication by The Urban Institute, "The High Cost of Education in Cities," by Betsy Levin, Thomas Muller and Corazon Sandoval documents the cost differential among urban, suburban and rural areas.

This study indicates that the main element in school expenditures which accounts for the higher costs of education in urban centers is salaries.

Most state salary schedules for personnel provide for pay increases on the basis of experience and training. Since urban school districts have significantly more experienced teachers, in terms of number of years in the profession, and higher trained personnel, in terms of degrees and certificates held, teachers' salaries in urban centers are higher than in rural or suburban areas. Thus, a large portion of higher expenditures for education in urban centers goes toward salaries. If the expenditures for salaries were to be kept constant through the omission of this factor in a state school finance program, rural areas would have smaller classes with relatively inexperienced and less trained teachers, and urban districts would have large classes with more experienced and better trained teachers.

This problem is further compounded by the fact that research evidence fails to show that more experience and an increase in degrees and certificates leads to higher achievement or productivity in the schools.

Another factor to be considered in equalizing educational opportunity is varying cost-of-living levels throughout the state.

The ideal state plan for the distribution of school funds should provide for differences in teacher pay in the various areas of the state, as well as an allowance for differences in cost-of-living. Levin, Muller and Sandoval recommend the use of a "cost-of-education index" for adjusting expenditures according to teacher salaries and cost-of-living.

Municipal Overburden

When considering the taxable wealth of urban centers, it appears at first glance that the inner city has a tremendous advantage over suburban and rural areas. High property values, business and industrial sites tend to provide a large tax base for the support of the schools.

This tax base tends to shrink, however, when one considers the many demands made on the property tax in urban centers. Besides the common governmental taxing units, the urban centers frequently have additional taxing units, such as water districts, junior colleges, health districts, public hospitals, river authorities, municipal utility districts, etc. Each of these units compete with the school district for available funds.

The problem is further aggravated by the relative high cost of governmental services in the urban center in contrast to the low cost in the suburbs and rural areas. Police and fire protection, street maintenance, sewage, garbage disposal, recreational facilities, all tend to come at a higher price in the central areas.

An allowance for the municipal overburden must be made in the distribution of school funds lest the large cities be unable to provide an adequate local share of school funds, or as is the current trend, provide funds at the expense and curtailment of other municipal services.

Adjustments for municipal overburden can be made by the use of a weighted formula which incorporates the average total taxes for the state divided by the total taxes in a school district.